Told Under a White Oak Tree

By Bill Hart's Pinto Pony

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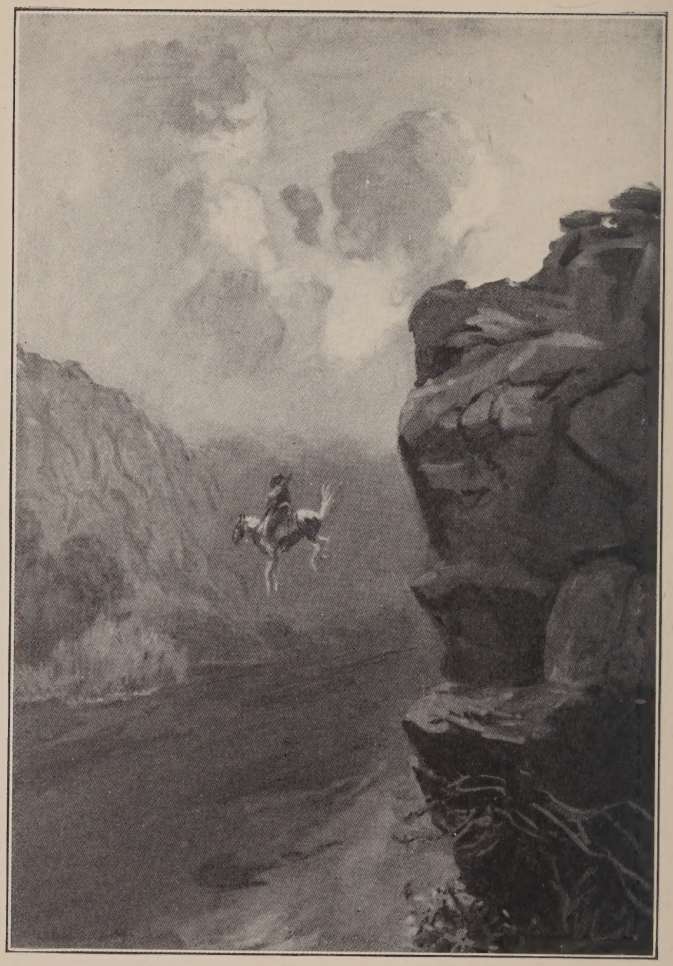
TOLD UNDER A WHITE OAK TREE



I AIN'T GOING TO TALK NONE ABOUT GOING OFF THAT CLIFF (*page* 38)

TOLD UNDER A WHITE OAK TREE

BY

BILL HART'S PINTO PONY

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TOLD UNDER A WHITE OAK TREE

BY BILL HART'S PINTO PONY

TOLD UNDER A WHITE OAK TREE

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Say, Kate, stay here. It's awful nice and shady under this big white oak tree. Let's stay here till the sun gets low, and besides, I want to talk to you some — about myself and the Boss. You know, he thinks he owns this ranch, but he does n't. Me and you and Lizbeth and Wolf, we own it, and, by golly, we'll run it too. What have I got to show for my seven years' work in pictures — if we don't own this place? 'Course I get lots of sugar and letters from little boys and girls, and grown-ups too, from all over the world — and I'd be real stuck up and sassy if I did n't appreciate it, which I

do — a whole lot. But sugar and letters ain't real estate, and I just want to tell you that this is Newhall, California, and right in the foothills, and land is worth something here — this ain't no sand and sagebrush country. And we are all pardners and it'll bring us in some money some day.

Any little family rows like I had with Lizbeth this morning don't change the case none. She's a mule, but she likes us a whole lot; and while we make her believe we don't care much about her, don't let any one come 'round and abuse her none, not while you and me and Wolf 's living, or there'll be people singing hymns; and the ones that tries to hurt Lizbeth won't hear the music nor know there's a funeral going on at all.

Wolf — he does n't need no protecting, nor affection, nor nothing, him being born

I CAN RUN FASTER THAN HE CAN

way up in Alaska. He's 'most as big and strong as Lizbeth, and him just a dog. Say, if you see him coming, tip me off — I ate his breakfast this morning, and I can run faster than he can.

But here comes Lizbeth. Hey! Lizbeth! Lizbeth! Come on over here in the shade. I won't hurt you. You must have come from the South where niggers and mules go to sleep standing up in the sun. That's right, old long ears, come on in; me and Cactus is just making a talk and I got a whole lot to say — and right now, when it's too hot in the open, is a good time to say it. Now, you all just make yourself comfortable and do a lot of listening, because you're my sweetheart, Kate, and you're my pardner, Mule. Wolf 's our pardner, too, but he don't savvy horse talk — and besides, I reckon he's

still looking for that lost breakfast. Gee! it was good. CORNMEAL MUSH.

Gee! This is going to be a talk like the Injun Chief makes every morning to his people, up in Nevada, where I come from. You know they don't have newspapers, and the Chief, he tells 'em all what's happened the day before, and they listen, too — you bet — just like you folks got to do. Well, to begin:

Big Bill says we are going to rest for six months longer. He can double his bet if he wants to. We won't holler none. Pictures is great — but when you've worked in 'em for seven years like me and Big Bill did, a rest ain't so bad. Before I struck up with Bill and allowed him to be nice to me and ride me — (and right here I want to say that "allow him to ride me" is no mistake of

the printer. I can throw him any time I want to — if it's cool weather, early morning, and I'm feeling good; but I'm getting away from my story, as the newspaper man says; now to get back). Before Bill and me became friends I was rode by a mean cuss. He was a Mexican, and he was so mean he'd put ground glass in a baby's milk, or steal the pants off a dog. Now, 'most times a Mexican is good to a hoss — because they know if they bung up and abuse their hoss they can't travel none. But this Mexican was bad — when he was born, the Devil, he laughed, and Snake Eye just come out o' the chuckle. Snake Eye, nice name for a human, ain't it? — "Snake Eye."

Long time after Bill was riding me and I had improved a lot and looked fat and shining and full of pep, Snake Eye, he come to

Bill and wanted to borrow me for a cowboy parade. Right after that the California Senate passed a law ag'in' profanity and Governor Stephens signed it without even looking at it. That was the same time Mayor Rolf of San Francisco sent a telegraph to Los Angeles offering help — thought it was an earthquake; and the Mexican Government got a big ship and took a whole load of Mexicans home free. Of course I don't mean to say all these things was account of me, but the fact remains that Snake Eye was the first one to go aboard that ship, so the bet goes as it lays.

I got lots and lots of time to think now, and sometimes when Bill, he stands a-patting my nose and rubbing me gentle like behind the ears, I git kind of sentimental and I

RIGHT AFTER THAT THE CALIFORNIA SENATE PASSED
A LAW AG'IN' PROFANITY

think back about all the times me and Bill has been up ag'in' it and what we been through. I remember oncet we had to do a ride down a crooked, winding mountain trail, and it had been raining and the ground was all soft and slippery when we was climbing up, and I was slipping and flopping all over. I said to Bill, "Gee! what is this going to be? Do I wear skates?" And Bill, he said, quiet-like (doggone him, he gets my goat when we get in danger, he gets so quiet), "It's just — well, there's nothing between us and silence, that's all." But I'm off again talking about Bill when all he had to do was sit on my back — but, anyhow, Bill, he said, "We got to do it, Pardner, and that ain't the worst of it. When we get near the bottom I got to throw you and we do a houlihan or whatever comes to

us because Lon Chaney, he's supposed to shoot you, in the story, and you go down."

I did n't have a whole lot of wind left, as I was climbing or slipping nearly straight up, but I said, "Say, Bill, why all the *favor-ite-ism?* Why don't they shoot you once in a while and you fall off and let me be a hero and run past the camera?" But we was up to the top now and Bill said nothing. He just looked down and I looked down, and we only had to look past our toes to do it. It was sure some nasty place. If you slipped you'd have to walk a mile to get back. But they waved down below and Cliff Smith shouted, "Come ahead! Come ahead!" and I jumped, lit running, and we was off. I just kept my feet working — I did n't dare hit the ground heavy or I'd slide all over the place. We made it —

more'n halfway — and then I got the cue on my right rein and heard the Boss say, "Now, Pardner, now, Pardner," and we took it. Golly, golly, golly! What a sensation we had! I was all over Bill and he was all over me. But no matter how tough we felt, it was n't in it with how we looked — leastwise how Bill looked after it was over. I could n't see myself, and if I could, I would n't talk about it none — if I looked anything like Bill did. Bill looked like he'd been having a bout with TNT or Jack Dempsey. His front looked like his back, and his back looked like Hell. I could only squint when he was off-saddling me because my eyes was full of mud, but what I could see was ENOUGH. And then one of the gang said, "Now we can get that easy ride over on the flat." But Bill said, "Not this day, boys, this pony

has done his day's work." And I reckon I had, too. I was limping just a little bit.

All this sounds easy — sounds like nothing at all. But I ain't strong on language and can't tell it very well, but to any one that's interested, I say, don't try it. It's no fun to tear straight down a hill on slippery mud and then let go all holts and fall and have a man weighing a hundred and ninety pounds under you and on top of you and all over you. And all the time you're rolling and hitting rocks and things. Come to think about it, it ain't no family reunion for the man either, because I weigh NINE hundred and ninety!

I've heard actors talk a lot about high lights. It has something to do with putting paint on your face in a way to make some-

IT'S NO FUN TO TEAR STRAIGHT DOWN A HILL ON SLIPPERY MUD

thing stand out. So I reckon that's a good word for me to use because I'm an actor, but I don't have to paint. The man what made the world and hosses and everything, he painted me. And there is such a man, you bet. I'm a hoss and I know — because I got hoss sense. But about them high lights. There's a lot of them, but the next one I remember is:

One day, Big Bill he come over to the corral with a bunch of the boys — and I dragged my ball and chain over close to the fence because I wanted to hear what was going on. I say ball and chain on the level. Afore Bill owned me they always used to put a chain on my hind leg with a ball on the end of it. A big heavy chain, too, almost as thick as my leg — because the other hosses liked the corral and liked to stay in

it, and I being kicked so much by Snake Eye, I got mean and ornery like he was, and I kicked them out; so they put that dog-gone half-ton of iron on me and I had to stand there and let that Dynamite hoss and his friends laugh at me, when, if I was free, I could have had him and his friends and all on the ground five seconds after the bell.

Well, when the gang started to talk I was wishing the earth would swallow me, for they was all talking about what a great jumper Dynamite was. I knowed it was true, for he has jumped over the fence to get away from my heels lots of times.

Bill had to have a hoss to jump through a window, and the gang was all saying he'd just have to take Dynamite, as no one had ever seen me jump (and I never had neither) and I had to stand there just quivering and

waiting to be passed up. Bill, he thought a long time and then he said: "Boys, I reckon you all know what you're talking about and I know you're all anxious to see me put over this stunt what's never been done before, but somehow, I just can't pass up the little paint hoss. You know we ain't a-goin' to jump over a hurdle out in the open. We're goin' to go through a window. Dynamite can jump, but he might get scared and not try. The little Paint has never jumped, but he won't scare none, and I know he'll try." Right there I was swelling up and looking indifferent, but, Gee! how I would have liked to give the Boss a handshake! Some of the boys hereupon got sort of riled up, and King, what's our ranch foreman here now, said, "A jumping hoss is a jumping hoss. 'T ain't all hosses can jump."

And Deacon Whitmore, he said, "All the grit in hosses ain't tucked into one." And Fat Jones, he said, "I never did cotton to calicos nohow. Solid colors for mine." And then Curley Eagles wound up with: "Say, Bill, you're losing your judgment and gitting plumb chicken-hearted over that paint hoss." The Boss stiffened just a little, but, Gee! he made me sore, there was that dog-gone quiet again, and he said, after looking 'em over careful, "Who's to ride this hoss, you fellers or me?" He did n't say no more. Just climbed over the fence and I nosed him, and he said, "You little son of a gun."

That night, just afore dark, when every one had gone home and I was chewing hay, the Boss he come and got me and took me up to the top of the hill where I never went before, where the big stage was, where they

took all the indoor pictures. He led me round to the back door and put my head up ag'in' it, and then he slapped me on my tail and said, "Go on, Paint." I thought he was going nutty, but I always do as I'm told when I think he means it, so I walked through the door which just swung open when I hit it with my head. There was no one inside — just a big bare saloon with a bar and round tables and chairs all over. The Boss, he took me straight across the room lengthwise and put my head right up against the window. And right then I commenced to git wise. I was to come a-runnin' head first through the back door, keep right on going and jump through the window. I did n't want to rob the Boss of the idea of teaching me. So I let him do it. First he got a hammer or a hatchet. Yes, it was a

hatchet, and took out the window, then he made me stand close and stick my head way through and look all over outside, then he led me back a bit and got on me, and kicked me a little, and just for that little kick I had some fun with him. I took it on the run, but I stopped kerplunk at the window — never tried to leave the floor, and the Boss, he got down and petted me, and talked soft to me, and, Gee! I was ashamed. Oh! golly, I felt mean, and wanted to turn away and go to it, and thunderation, the Boss thought I was scared. Gee! it was awful. If I could only use human language, how I would have loved to do it right there. But I could n't. So I could only nose him and listen and he said, "Paint, this board floor is a bad take-off and you must try not to slip, and this two-by-four bottom of the window is three

feet two inches from the ground, so you got to get up in the air, and not forgetting, old-timer, that there won't be more 'n six inches to spare each side of my legs, and nothing to speak of over my head, and me ridin' low."

He did n't say no more, just petted me a minute, and got on me and rode me back, and when he wheeled me I was gone and outside before you could say Jack Rabbit three times.

The Boss, he don't swear much, only when he's mad, and I was kind of surprised when he got off me and looked at me and said, "Well, I'm damned." Then he took off his hat and scratched his head and led me around to the back door and inside again, and I was wondering what it was all about until I see him pick up a bundle he

had brought with him and take out some stuff that you could see through and that looked like fine chicken wire, only it was soft. He took the hammer and some tacks and nailed it up over the window and got on me again, and we went through it. And I had the soft stuff (cheesecloth, the Boss called it) all around my head just like little girls do when they dress in white and parade. Then the Boss just pulled it off and left me standing, and went inside, and I heard the hammer going and I know'd he was putting the window back in — and then he comes back and just grinned and we went back to the corral.

The next day was the big doings, and maybe I was n't proud when they came and got me and took the ball and chain off my hind leg, and maybe I did n't upstage that

bunch of hosses and sidle over and try to get a kick at Dynamite when I was going out. No use trying to say I did n't, because I'll tell the world I did! And he got it, too, and he just beat it like a coyote. I don't bear malice none, but I stay mad a long time. And right here I want to say, there's just two things I hate and Dynamite is both of them.

Well, when we got up the hill, the Boss, he took me through the back door again, but he led me this time. The saloon was just full of people, must 'a' been two hundred, and all the lights was spitting sparks, and the cameras was up on the platforms, and the Boss, he just led me over to the window again and petted me, never saying a word. And then he started to lead me back out, and halfway out he stopped and talked to two actors and said, "Now, Willis,

you and Ross stand right here — don't get over four feet away from this spot." And I did n't understand what this had to do with us until we got outside the back door and it closed and the Boss took down his rope and started to make a loop. I turned my head and looked at him kind of inquiring-like, and he said, "That's it, Pardner, I got to rope 'em as we go through, so you see how much depends on you hitting that window plumb center." I just could n't help the look of scorn that come into my eyes. And he got it, because he said quick, "You're right, Paint, Dynamite could n't 'a' done it in a million years. He'd 'a' broke my neck." So I know'd he understood and I was satisfied.

I've worked a lot in pictures and I've seen a lot of stunts pulled off and never seen

WILLIS AND ROSS COME PILING THROUGH THE WINDOW ON THE END OF THAT ROPE

actors or extra people turn a hair. They get used to 'em. But when me and the Boss hit the ground outside and Willis and Ross come piling through the window on the end of that rope — and the cameras stopped grinding — there was two hundred people jumping up in the air and shouting in that saloon. We was outside, but they made noise enough to hear 'em in China.

The Boss, he slid off me and looked me over and found a little scratch on my nose where the glass had cut me. And the dog-gone fool, he put his mouth right down to it and then turned away — wiping his eyes. Maybe it's things like that which make all the little boys like my Boss and think he's a hero. Of course I think they should, only I can't see WHY they should when I do all the work.

But I suppose it must be fine for a boy to have something to look up to. A regular hero. It must be healthy for him and give him a high mark to shoot at, and just kind of make him feel *stim-i-lated* and warm all over because he wants to grow up and be like his hero.

Big Bill, he says, "It's fine for the boys, but tough on me. Just think what I got to try and live up to," says he, "and how can I do it when I got an ornery no-account cuss like you (meaning me) hanging round." Doggone him, he always blames me. But I'm gitting off the trail. I got to tell about some more of them there high lights, pronto, or I'll keep you folks here under the trees all day, and it's gitting near feeding time.

You folks was never up in the Chats-

worth Country, were you? There must 'a' been a terrible row up there sometime between the earth and the stars and such things, because that country is just a bunch o' dry arroyos and draws — and big rocks, boulders that go so high they shut out the sun. Well, Chatsworth was where we had our next little affair which has to do with high lights.

We was to do a stunt for "The Narrow Trail." The Boss, he wrote the story for himself and I copped it. If you people could read I could show you the notices and prove it to you. But don't ever say anything to the Boss that I said so. It's a sore spot with him, and I don't want to see you folks get in wrong.

Well, this was some stunt when I looked at it first. I just could n't believe my eyes.

They had found a canyon where a tree about a hundred feet long had fallen across, and on the far side, it was only wide enough for the branches to grow out of it, and way down below, more feet than I can count (I only know as high as twenty now), was the bottom, all rocks too. The Boss, he led me up to the high place where the thick end of the tree was (and that end did n't look as wide as a barn door to me neither) and just let me contemplate. It did n't take me long to do it. I said right quick, "What are you aiming to take me home in — a wagon or a truck, or are you going to bury me right here in the rocks?" He did n't say a word, and then I cut loose, because I knew I had him and I rubbed it in. You see they could 'a' got rubber shoes for me, but they did n't, and the Boss, he blamed himself for not do-

ing it personal, and I just rode him to death, and with a whole lot of reason, too, because I was to walk across that tree making a get-away for the Boss — and me did n't even have corks on. I was smooth-shod and I could of had rubber shoes. "But blame it on the property man," I said. "That's what they always do in pictures, 'cause no one can ever find him." That's what I wound up with saying to the Boss. Golly, he felt bad and I knew it. But here we were — miles and miles away from home and a two-thousand-dollar day lost — if we did n't go through. So after I had jawed till my teeth hurt, I sidled over and rubbed up ag'in' Bill, which meant "Let's go" — so far as I was concerned.

I ain't claiming that Bill did n't say nothing about them rubber shoes what I did n't

have. He said a whole lot, but, doggone it, talk don't make rubber shoes for a hoss any more than it makes tires for a Henry. But I had said, "Let's go," and that settled it, for when I was ready they all had to step. I ain't got nothing to say about the first trip, because nothing happened. We made it. It was the second trip when the fireworks started.

The Boss, of course (no credit to him), had let me go straight across; but, scorpions and tarantulas! they wanted a close-up of me in the middle of the log, pausing like, and Bill petting me and talking nice (all for the story, of course), and it could n't be got in the long shot without me standing there a week for Joe to switch his camera, so we HAD TO DO IT AGAIN!

I've talked about Bill's cuss words afore,

so I'll pass it up this time. What's the use of making him worse than he is when it can't be did — MUCH!

Well, we started, and when we got to the center (the highest place, of course), Bill stopped me and started to do his acting what makes him a hero — and *me a-doing it all*, trying to stand there like I was a wire-walker in a circus. It could n't be done, that's all, and off we went. My hind end went first, and quicker'n lightning, Bill cued for my front end too (you got to hand it to him he thinks kind of quick in a pinch), so I throw'd my front end with my hind end, and we went down sideways instead of me trying to hold on in front and going over backwards. We did n't have no time to think. We just hit, that's all. And I know'd Bill was all twisted around under

me. His face was sticking out and was only a little ways from my front hoofs. He said, "Lay still, you little —— —— —— —— —— —— —— runt! Don't move or my face will be a whole lot worse'n it is." But his voice was soft and kind, and I — Gee! I would n't 'a' kicked for eight million dollars, and he know'd it too.

When the boys got down there and eased me up and pulled Bill out, it was my turn to be helped up, and I was a mess. My left side (my falling side) was all cut with sharp rocks. Gee! I was cut all over; and Bill said, "Pardner, whether you like it or not, you're going to eat grass for the rest of your days. No more pictures or work for you."

That's the real inside dope of how I come to lay idle for two years. That's the real how of why the Boss had to ride them other

WE WENT DOWN SIDEWAYS

dogies for fifteen pictures. But the Great American Public, and some of the Great European ones too, had something to say about that, and just would n't have it. They kept writing to me and Bill all the time a-saying Bill was jealous of me and that's why he put me out of the game. Oh! they said all kinds of things just to show they meant it. Of course, I don't know whether Bill was really jealous of me or not, but he would n't stand the gaff and brought me back — and you being hosses and one a mule, and supposed to be wise, can draw your own conclusions. For my part, when you give way, it's a sign of weakness and GUILT. Anyhow, back I come.

And right off the reel the Boss, he said to me, "Paint, can you swim?" And I said, "Swim, what's that?" And a bunch of

boys standing round said, "You're up against it this time, Bill." But Bill did n't let on like he noticed 'em at all and kept right on talking to me. And he said, "You know what a river is, don't you, Paint?" And I said, "You bet." And he said, "Well that's what swim means. You got to jump into a river and swim out." And, gee! how I did chuckle inside. Why, that was my middle name. But all I said was, "Boss, if any reward could bring me back to pictures, you've named it. I like to get wet." And the boys, not understanding my humor, laughed again.

I'd 'a' said more, only I was mad at the boys for laughing when I did n't understand what swim was; so I just lay low knowing I'd put something over on them. SWIM! — if that's what it was, why, gee

whiz! up in Nevada I did n't only belong to lakes and rivers, I was married to 'em. But right here, I got to digress — or whatever that big word is — for a while, just to tell you about my early life, Kate, and you too, Mule.

Years and years ago there was a big war. We Americans all got foolish and got fighting each other. Think of it — all one family and fighting! There was a great General in that war, named Grant, and all the folks in Europe, they said what a great fighter he was, and one big Arab King over there, he sent a big present to General Grant, an Arab hoss, what Grant, he rode in the war.

And when the fighting was all over and everybody said they was sorry, General Grant he sent Red Top — that's what he named the hoss — to a friend of his out in Nevada, because General Grant, he lived in

a big white house in a big city which was no place for a hoss.

This Mr. Nevada Man owned the whole country that was full of wild hosses and tame hosses too! And seeing as old Red Top had been traveled from Europe to America, and that he had been shot at a whole lot by cannons, Mr. Nevada Man, he just said, "Go to it, old-timer, and enjoy yourself." And he turned him loose on the prairie to go anywhere he doggone pleased. And in a few years there was lots of little Red Tops running across the mesa and playing in the rivers. And one of 'em was my great-grandfather. He told my grandfather all about Red Top, and my grandfather, he told my father, and my father, he told me, because we all had Red Tops. Just take a look at this forelock, Miss Cactus Kate, and

feel proud, and you, too, you dirt-wagon Mule, just you pay me proper respect and be joyful that I associate with you, what comes from a grading camp, because *my* folks come from Arabville in Europe and was all regular blueblooded people.

Well, in a few days the Boss, he come and got me and took me down to the cars and we started. We was going up into the country what Bill likes, Snorer, or some such name as that. Anyhow, it's in the foothills of the Sara's mountains. I'm wrong on that name, too, but I'm doing the best I can on names.

Well, our first morning in Snorer we started out. Gee! it was a pretty country. Bill, he told me it was the place where all the gold come from what paid for the Civil War what my great-great-grandfather

fought in. We found our river all right, and then I heard we was to get the water stuff for two stories, "Sand" and "The Toll Gate" — and "Sand" come first.

I had to jump off of a cliff into a river while a feller on the other bank was shooting at us. 'Course the Boss, he was on my back, and he sends me back out of range and he dives under the water, fooling the feller what's doing the shooting, making him think he's dead. The feller goes away and the Boss, he comes up; him not being hit at all, and follows the feller and gits him, and I, being lonesome for the Boss, I swim over by myself and follow him ('course that's all in the story).

When we gits all ready, the Boss, he says: "Boys, I'm going to take the little feller in first and see if he can swim. If I jump him

off that cliff and he could n't swim, it would be curtains for him." Right here I had my fun with all the boys standing round. I would n't even look at that river, much less get my feet wet. No, siree! The Boss, he tried and tried, but I'd shy away every time. Then the Boss, he got down and commenced to scold me — and I said, "Look here, Bill, I ain't wishful to cause no trouble, but I'm afraid that water'll give me a cold in the head."

But pretty soon the Boss, his voice got soft again, and I knew it was all off. I had my fun, anyhow, and when he got on me I almost jumped from under him gitting into that river. I just played round in there, because I loved it. And when we came out the Boss, he kind of glared at the boys and said, "Swim? That hoss has got web feet."

I ain't going to talk none about going off that cliff. When the Boss took me up there and I looked down, I felt about as warm as a gas stove in winter with the heat turned off. I just shut my eyes when we went — and when we came up from under half the water in the State of California, was I glad? Gee!

The Boss slid off me to see if I was all right, and I played round and splashed water on him to show him I was. I like wet, anyhow. Things too dry ain't no good, nohow. If you walk on a dry board it squeaks.

We soon got all our water stuff, for what I described to you afore for the "Sand" story, because it was just play for me. I just delighted in swimming high to show 'em how expert I was. If we had n't been way under before, the Boss would n't 'a' been wet above his knees. Then we went to our

WE CAME UP FROM UNDER HALF THE WATER IN THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

"Toll Gate" location. What they had picked out the day afore — and believe me they were some pickers.

It was a hole — a tunnel — or a sewer right through the mountain. You can call it what you like, but that is what it was. It was about seventy-five or a hundred yards long. There was an overhanging cave where you went in and the same where you came out, and then it just narrowed down to a hole — just room for a horse to swim and a man to sit on him and not bump his head on the ceiling. It was about six feet wide at the water level, and all through it water was dripping down in a little stream out of the rocks.

Bill, he looked at it a long, long time — longer than I ever see him look at any stunt before. Then he said, "Any ledges in there

under water to upset a hoss?" And Joe, the camera man, he said: "I took off my clothes and went through there yesterday on some planks lashed together and I sounded all the way through with a pole. It averages about eight feet deep 'cept in one place, where there's a hole, about forty feet long, where I could n't touch bottom at all." And Bill said, "Deepness don't matter none, but do you strike any ledges gitting out of the hole?" Joe, he said he did n't think so, but he went through fast account of the current and was n't sure. Then the Boss, he thought a long time ag'in, and then he turned to the boys and made 'em a little talk. There was n't any joking or kidding now — they was some serious-looking bunch of cow-waddies, you bet.

"Boys," said Bill, "this will be great for

the story if we can git it. In the story this tunnel is the entrance to an outlaws' cave, and there's nine of us got to go through and carry pine-knot torches in our free hand so Joe kin set up at the other end and have light to photograph us coming through. Now you all got hosses as can swim — but if any one wants to say no they are free to do it, and no hard feelings."

There was a little pause, and then Wolf Verduga, the Injun, he spoke up and said, "Wherever you go, Bill, is good enough for us." And Bill, he said, "Thanks, boys, get ready." And he turned to me and loosened up my cinch.

The boys all got off and did likewise, because a hoss can't swim free if he's cinched too tight, and if he gets in trouble it's good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye.

When Bill got on me and we was all ready, Bill turned to the boys again and said, "Boys, come single file and eight feet apart, and no matter what happens, don't move a man or a hoss until me and Paint is the other side of that hole, what Joe says is about fifty feet from this here end. Be sure about that, boys, because it looks to me like a tough job." The boys, they agreed, and Bill and me started.

Golly, that water was cold, and we was going ag'in' the current. Wow! it was cold! But I swum all right, and pretty soon we hit a place where the water did n't hit me so hard, but it kind of pulled me down in round whirligigs, and I know'd we was in the deep place, but I was swimming strong and easy — and away at the other end I could see Joe on a ledge of rocks, grinding his camera.

He did n't look no bigger than a speck. And then all at once something happens that made me feel like death.

My front feet hit a ledge of rock under the water, and I could n't find nothing behind to climb on. Right there I seen it coming. You know we hosses can scent danger and see our finish quicker than a man. I tried to climb. I tried, I tried, O God! how I tried. Right there I could see me a-drowning the Boss — my Boss — what, no matter how he ever jawed me, his eyes always looked at me so kind, and they're as blue as a robin's eggs. I got my front legs way up, and the Boss, he was quarter riding way off on one side to steady me, but I had nothing under me but that whirlpool of water a-sucking me down.

I struggled and struggled, but it was n't

any good. And then I put everything I had into a mighty jump, but I could n't make it — it could n't be done, and over I come — right on the Boss — him staying right with me. The Boss has told me since then never to breathe under water. But I did n't know it then, and as we went down and down, I just kicked and lunged. I was strangling when we come up. The Boss was still with me. How I did n't strike him and kick him to death, I don't know, but there he was with his hand through my cheek strap, trying to get my head above water. Oh! I am plumb ashamed of myself, now when I think of it. I plumb lost my head. I was crazy.

I was facing the wall when we come up, and I tried to climb up it. The surface of the wall was rough, and I just dug into it

I JUST DUG INTO IT AND CLIMBED LIKE A WILD HOSS THAT I WAS

and climbed like a wild hoss that I was — until I come over backward on the Boss ag'in, because the top of the tunnel was just like a half-circle. Down we went again, and this time I felt the Boss, and know'd I had kicked him, because I did n't feel him any more, but I know he'll never hold it ag'in' me 'cause I was dying. I felt all kinds of things, and there was an awful roaring in my head, and I knew I could n't move fast any more, but I kept struggling, and by and by I come up ag'in.

The Boss, he was n't there, but just in a second he come up, too, about ten feet away from me. I looked at him and tried to say, Good-bye, and I made a sound. The Boss says I looked at him appealing-like and called to him. Anyhow, he did n't try to get out himself. He come to me ag'in, and he

got me by the head and he said, "God help us, Pardner, I'm afraid this is the finish." And that's what made me say — a little while back — that there is a God, and you bet there is, too, because, as the Boss talked to me, I got quiet and looked at him — just keeping my feet going to keep afloat — and the Boss said — (Oh! and he has never talked to me like that before or since — he did n't seem to be talking, it seemed to come right out of his heart —) he said: "Steady, Paint, steady, I ain't a-going to leave you, old man. If we go we'll go together. Take it easy — that's the boy — that's the boy — easy — easy — work this way, Pardner, work this way." And then, all at once, I know'd that he was turning me around, and then I seen the light where we had come in and a lot of figures there what looked like spirits.

And then the Boss said again, "Now, old man, come ahead — come ahead" — and I felt we was going toward the light, but I could n't see much. I seemed to be going blind, but I kept my feet working, and all at once I felt a lot of hands grab me, and I was outside, and I felt awful sick all over, but I see the Boss laying stretched out on the rocks and I pushed through the boys and tried to nose him. And then a terrible dizziness came over me and I felt like everything was going round and round, and I was falling, and a whole lot of hands grabbed me again, and the boys was bracing their bodies up against me, and they let me down easy aside the Boss. I know'd he was there, because the last thing I can remember, before everything went dark and the sun stopped shining, was putting my head on him like

we always did when we rolled on the ground and played.

A long time after that (I heard the boys saying it was hours) I seen the light ag'in, and the boys was all standing around, and the Boss, he was down on his knees beside my head, and what do you think he was doing? — doggone if he was n't washing my mouth out with WATER and a sponge. Just like I had n't had enough of WATER. I got mad right there, and the Boss said, "Let him up, let him up," and up I come — and the madder I got, the Boss just kept laughing and laughing and doing a regular Injun dance, and then he just hollered.

"There's life in the old boy yet" — and then he put his arms around me and hugged me tight and started to wipe his eyes again — so how the dickens could I stay mad! I

just said to him, "Keep your undershirt on, Bill, it's cold."

The West is a big country, and there's all kinds of jobs for all kinds of men — and we was making pictures, and we had to make 'em, so everybody held a pow-wow. And it was decided we would climb over the mountain and go down to the other end of the tunnel, and all back in, and Joe could set up just outside and grind on us coming out. And with a cut to the interior of the outlaws' cave to cover from where me and the Boss went down to where we come out, we could get away with it.

This is sort o' giving the picture game away to you, Kate, and you, too, Mule, but when you've worked in 'em as long as I have, you'll find there's plenty of heroics and stunts without talking about some-

thing what ain't. And speaking of stunts, the trip over that mountain, about a quarter of a mile up straight, and the same distance down straight, was n't no picnic neither. I was pretty weak, and the Boss, he walked and stayed with me, because I needed help a little bit, and we had some fun watching some of the other stock taking headers — of course they could n't help it, because it would take a mountain goat to keep his feet.

What's that you're saying, Mule? Why did n't the boys come in and help us when we was drowning, or throw us a rope? Why, you poor specimen of mule-flesh, did n't I explain to you that the deep hole was fifty feet from the entrance, and the only thing excepting God what saved our lives was that we was the only two in it, with me kicking

and thrashing round? And, you locoed fool, if you know'd anything about a rope, you 'd know a cowpuncher can't throw a rope fifty feet on a straight line in a hole six feet across and not more than that high in the middle! I reckon the only man you ever seen throw a rope was down a well with a bucket on the end of it. But the sun's gitting low and 't ain't too hot now — let's go over by the house and steal some more leaves off Bill's peach trees — and if he hollers leave him to me. There's no bonds like heart-bonds. Come ahead!

THE END

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